



JAZZ & BLUES

F L O R I D A

FLORIDA'S ONLINE GUIDE TO LIVE JAZZ & BLUES

FEATURED ARTIST
RAUL MIDÓN

MARY HALVORSON • FRANK GREATHOUSE • MATT HEISTER
DAMON FOWLER GROUP • THE COOK TRIO • DEBBIE DAVIES
BRUBECK BROTHERS QUARTET • SOULFONIC
ERROL RACKIPOV QUARTET • SHEBA, THE MISSISSIPPI QUEEN

RAUL MIDÓN

by Bill Meredith



IF RAUL MIDÓN HAD STREAMLINED HIS hybrid jazz/pop/R&B sound into any one of those categories during his 14-year solo recording career, the gifted artist might be a bigger star. He just wouldn't be Raul Midón.

"That blend is really who I am," the singer, guitarist and songwriter says by phone from his home in Maryland. "Although I don't consciously try to do it."

The 47-year-old Midón overcame major obstacles to create his singular musical persona. He and twin brother Marco (now an electrical engineer for NASA), the sons of an Argentinean father and an African-American mother, were born prematurely in New Mexico — then unwittingly blinded because hospitals didn't realize that infants in incubators needed eye protection in the mid-1960s.

Inspired by his father's diverse record collection, Raul started playing hand drums at age 4 before switching to guitar while he and Marco attended a school for the blind. After high school, Raul attended the University of Miami, enhancing his physical, percussive finger-picking guitar style through the harmonic and improvisational knowledge of recently retired UM icon Randall Dollahon.

"I took flamenco and classical guitar lessons in New Mexico," Midón says, "and learned a great deal at UM. I took lessons with Randall every week, and credit him with a lot. He was tough, but figured out what each student needed and personally helped them get there. I also studied jazz and classical composition and voice, and took vocal lessons with Gina Moretta after UM."

During his 15 years living in Miami, Midón became a first-call backing vocalist for artists like Shakira, Ricky Martin and Julio Iglesias while developing his songwriting and performance techniques

live and on three independent CDs. Seven years in New York City followed, with Midón recording his three major-label releases (*State of Mind*, 2005; *A World Within a World*, 2007, both on Manhattan/EMI; and *Synthesis*, 2009, on Decca/Universal) before relocating to Maryland.

Midón was signed to Manhattan/EMI by legendary producer Arif Mardin (Bee Gees, Aretha Franklin, Norah Jones). The major-label releases enabled him to work with a roster of jazz heavyweights including saxophonist/clarinetist Paquito D'Rivera, vibraphonist Stefon Harris, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, bassists Larry Klein and Me'shell Ndegeocello, and organist Larry Goldings. Midón also collaborated with pop star Jason Mraz, bassist Marcus Miller and keyboard giants Herbie Hancock and Stevie Wonder.

Yet Midón's latest CD, last year's *Invisible Chains—Live From NYC*, was released independently. Also available as a CD/DVD double-pack, the live solo performances from Joe's Pub in Manhattan display influences from guitar heroes Wes Montgomery and Pat Metheny to pop stars Joni Mitchell and Paul Simon to horn icons Charlie Parker and Clifford Brown (the trumpeter who helped to inspire Midón's incredible vocal "mouth trumpet" mimicry).

RAUL MIDÓN

Now, with a home recording studio enhanced by computer software for the blind, Midón will also engineer and produce his as-yet-unnamed eighth CD, which is slated for release early next year. And despite the fact that he doesn't plan to release it on a major label, the recording will feature stars like soul icon Bill Withers, R&B singer-songwriter Lizz Wright, Grammy-winning jazz vocalist Dianne Reeves and bass virtuoso Richard Bona.

"The only advantage to being a blind musician may be an additional focus," Midón says. "And as your own producer, you have a lot of decisions to focus on. But being a blind composer, and writing lyrically about things you've never seen, is the toughest part."

Having recently played in Switzerland, Serbia, Japan and Canada, and with annual trips to Monte Carlo and France, Midón can envision joining some of his jazz heroes in one respect — becoming more popular overseas than in the United States, at least thus far. Perhaps his next CD should be titled *Subject to Change*.



Raul Midón will perform solo shows at 7 and 9PM July 3-4 at Jazziz Nightlife in Mizner Park, Boca Raton. The first 20 ticket purchasers will also receive a free copy of his latest CD, *Invisible Chains — Live From NYC*. Call 561-300-0730 or visit Jazziznightlife.com.



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As both a solo performer and as half of the country-blues duo Screamin' and Cryin', Frank Greathouse has been a fixture of the Fort Myers blues scene for years. Last year, Greathouse closed up his shop, Real Guitars, which leaves him more time to perform. It was North Carolina where he developed a love for the blues as a teenager, particularly after hearing Bob Dylan's first album and Robert Johnson's *King of the Delta Blues*. While his early forays were in bluegrass — he played mandolin with the New Deal String Band and with Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs — Greathouse is a masterful blues interpreter, as revealed on his new recording, *One Way Ticket*. Switching among steel-bodied resonator, standard acoustic and electric guitars and mandolin, Greathouse interprets a variety of blues classics, including superb renditions of "Broke Down Engine," "Stoop Down Mama" and "Black Girl," as well as excellent originals, such as the title track. Find him Tuesdays at Steve B's. **BW**



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DAMON FOWLER GROUP
BAMBOO ROOM, LAKE WORTH/JULY 7
BLUETOOTH, SARASOTA/JULY 11
MANGO FEST, GERMAN AMERICAN SOCIAL CLUB, CAPE CORAL/JULY 13

Damon Fowler's blues are steeped in swamp water, marinated in moonshine and stirred with a cypress root. The Brandon, Fla., native boasts wizardly chops on electric, lap-steel and Dobro guitars, as well as a keening, distinctive vocal style. His songs can be as genial as an invite to pull up a chair and pop open a cold one, or as menacing as the fanged critters and mysterious hoodoo that lurk in the depths of the Okeefeenokee. Fowler displays both sides of his musical persona on his excellent 2011 release *Devil Got His Way*, which showcases his nettled



leads, country-soul vocals, scene-setting original tunes and easy rapport with bassist Chuck Riley and drummer James McKnight. Fowler also performs with South Florida's Southern Hospitality (featuring fellow blues stringer JP Soars and pianist Victor Wainwright), whose debut disc, *Easy Livin'*, was released earlier this year. **BW**

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S P O T L I G H T

DEBBIE DAVIES

BRADFORDVILLE BLUES, TALLAHASSEE/JULY 12
 MANGO FEST, GERMAN AMERICAN SOCIAL CLUB, CAPE CORAL/JULY 13-14
 BAYSIDE GRILLE, KEY LARGO/JULY 16-17
 MCWELL'S, ORLANDO/JULY 18
 ACE'S, BRADENTON/JULY 19

Debbie Davies' 2009 all-instrumental CD *Holdin' Court* was aptly named. The guitarist displayed her mastery of electric blues styles, tipping her hand to Alberts King and Collins, Gatemouth Brown and Ronnie Earl, and even throwing in some reverb-laden surf action. Davies had the opportunity to study Collins up close, when he invited her to join his band in the '80s. She went on to record with names such as John Mayall, James Cotton



and Charlie Musselwhite, and has headlined all-star discs with Kenny Neal and Tab Benoit, and Anson Funderburgh and Otis Grand. On her latest CD, *After the Fall*, Davies' leads are as fiery as ever. She also returned to the vocal mic, her voice as full of feeling as her playing on a powerful set that includes a joyful instrumental salute to the late Robin Rogers. BW

SOULFONIC

BLUE ROOSTER, SARASOTA/JULY 12
 BIG EASY, HOLLYWOOD/JULY 13

Two versions of soul-blues powerhouse Soulfonic are grooving the Sunshine State this month. In Sarasota, guitarist/vocalist **Billy Seward** leads a lean three-piece combo. In Hollywood, saxophonist Stan Waldman heads up a seven-piece ensemble. Seward and Waldman played together in the Hurricane Blues Band in the 1980s. They pooled their talents again in recent years, forming the allstar Soulfonic along with dynamic vocalist Betty Padgett and performing classic Chicago blues and Memphis soul. Blessed with vocal and guitar skills ideally suited to Beale Street blues and R&B, Seward also convincingly writes songs in the idiom.



Meanwhile, Waldman fires up the roadhouse tenor alongside trumpeter Jason Rozner, keyboardist Philip Bithell, bassist Vinnie Fontana and drummer Ron Wilson in the South Florida-based Soulfonic. Guitarist Skip Turner provides the molten leads, and Padgett remains one of the area's most soulful singers. BW

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SHEBA, THE MISSISSIPPI QUEEN
DOWNTOWN AT THE GARDENS, PALM BEACH
GARDENS/JULY 13
CRAWDADDY'S, JENSEN BEACH/JULY 20
MCCALL'S, THE VILLAGES/JULY 26 (w/ Little Mike
& the Tornadoes)

In her autobiographical tune, "Blues of the Soul," Sheba recalls how she and her family would toil in the Mississippi cotton fields from sunup to sundown, returning home so tired they couldn't do much more than moan the blues. Her mother relocated the family to Florida when Sheba was 12, in search of a better life. Currently based in Ocala, the singer gained popularity in South Florida in the late '90s with her band Sheba & the Rhythm Kings featuring guitarist Ken "Snowman" Minahan. But Sheba doesn't sing only about sharecropping; most of her music deals with physical activity of a more intimate nature. The heated numbers on her album *Butter on My Rolls* might send you to a cold shower. Her upcoming CD, featuring a tune titled "Freakish Blues," promises similar joys. Sheba returns to South Florida this month. **BW**



MATT HEISTER
ON THE ROCKS, MELBOURNE/JULY 1
FOSSANER MUSEUM OF ART, MELBOURNE/JULY 5
ATLANTIC MUSIC CENTER, MELBOURNE/
JULY 6 (afternoon)
DEBAUCHERY, MELBOURNE/JULY 6 (evening)

Guitarist Matt Heister may live in New York City, but he has deep roots in Central Florida, where he once resided. Heister maintains a presence here as Director of Jazz for the Melbourne-based WFIT-FM and host of the weekly jazz program *Freedom in the Groove*, which is broadcast remotely from the Big Apple. And the traditional jazz guitarist's clean tones — something he continues to hone at New York's New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music — find welcoming ears here and up north. Cue up a recent YouTube video of Heister interpreting "What is This Thing Called Love?" to see why. In Melbourne, he'll perform with friends and family like bassists Jim Heister and Jon Warcholak, saxophonist Dan Wilborn, bassist/vocalist Ryan Waszmer, and drummers Doug Grover and Jonathan Waszmer. **BM**



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S P O T L I G H T

MARY HALVORSON

TIMUCUA WHITE HOUSE, ORLANDO/JULY 1

Labeled "New York City's least-predictable improviser" by critic Howard Mandel, guitarist Mary Halvorson more than lives up to the hype. In addition to the expansive and imaginative releases under her own name, Halvorson is a member of bands led by musical adventurers Anthony Braxton, Marc Ribot and Tim Berne. The Boston-born, Wesleyan University-educated sonic explorer now resides in Brooklyn, New York's creative nerve center. She has forthcoming releases with both her septet and the avant-rock band People, and will appear in Florida with a new seven-piece lineup comprising trumpeter Tom Parmeter, alto saxophonist David Pate, tenor saxophonist Dan Jordan, trombonist



Keith Oshiro, bassist Doug Matthews and drummer Tomas Fujiwara at the Timucua White House. Owned by Benoit Glazer, music director for Cirque du Soleil's shows in Orlando, the nonprofit, home-based performance space is becoming a premier venue for avant-garde music and jazz. Visit timucua.com for directions and more info. **BM**

THE COOK TRIO

HEIDI'S JAZZ CLUB, COCOA BEACH/JULY 7

ARTS GARAGE, DELRAY BEACH/JULY 13

THE GRAND BOHEMIAN, ORLANDO/JULY 20, 26 From The Kinks to The Beach Boys to The Black Crowes, groups featuring siblings are a staple of rock 'n' roll. But brothers Ian and Jason Cook reach further back for inspiration within The Cook Trio. Rounded out by bassist Kyle Jones, the throwback Central Florida act from Viera are primarily influenced by the Hot Club of France, the World War II-era group co-led by Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt and French violinist Stephane Grappelli. On the trio's latest CD, *Moonlight*, they revisit chestnuts such as Reinhardt's "Cou Cou" and Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing



(If it Ain't Got That Swing)." Doing justice to such time-honored pieces requires expert acoustic string work, and all three musicians are clearly up to the challenge. Their forthcoming project, a live DVD recorded at the historic Cocoa Village Playhouse, will offer both audio and video proof. A YouTube clip of "Cou Cou" whets the appetite. **BM**

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"My history of my life is in my songs." -Judy Garland

S P O T L I G H T

BRUBECK BROTHERS QUARTET CORAL GABLES CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH/ JULY 25

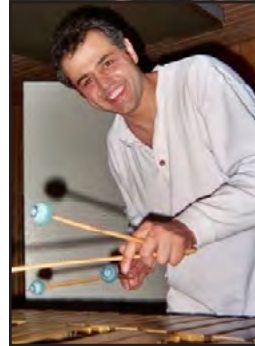
Pianist Dave Brubeck (1920-2012) is one of the most recognizable names in jazz. Drummer Dan Brubeck and multi-instrumentalist Chris Brubeck have carried on their father's legacy while playing in Dad's venerable quartet, several of their own bands, and together in the Brubeck Brothers Quartet. Also featuring guitarist Mike DeMicco and pianist Chuck Lamb, the BBQ display a blend of expressive traditional and muscular modern jazz on their latest recording, *Life Times*, which features four compositions by their father and his signature "Take Five," written by Paul Desmond. Lamb and DeMicco provide stellar compositions, solos and accompaniment to Dan Brubeck's drumming, which displays the odd time signatures for which his father was celebrated (and which has been featured on numerous albums by other artists). A noted composer, Chris Brubeck is an outstanding fretless electric bassist and bass trombonist who's versatile enough to add occasional piano, guitar and vocals. BM



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ERROL RACKIPOV QUARTET BASS MUSEUM OF ART, MIAMI BEACH/JULY 26

Vibraphonist and marimba player Errol Rackipov has proven a standout on the stage and in the classroom. A professor at two Miami institutions known for their jazz programs — Florida International University and Florida Memorial University — the Bulgarian-born mallet wizard shares knowledge gleaned from studies with vibes great Gary Burton at Berklee College of Music in Boston. Burton also mentored Rackipov while he earned his Master's degree at the University of Miami. While his practical knowledge has been on display with various local symphonies and pop orchestras, Rackipov is also prized by area jazz artists such as Randy Bernsen, Mike Orta and Paulette Dozier.



But his skills are perhaps best spotlighted within his own talented quartet. Rounded out by bassist Jonathan Dadurka, saxophonist Dave Fernandez and drummer Rodolfo Zuniga, the group performs Rackipov's unique blend of jazz harmony, chamber music undertones and Eastern European folk rhythms within standards and his ample originals. BM



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Founded in 1996, the Fort Pierce Jazz & Blues Society is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster a greater awareness and love for Jazz and Blues by exposing these great American art forms to schools and the community, and by providing scholarships to deserving college-bound students who wish to further their musical knowledge and skill.



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